U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE - SPOTLIGHT SPECIES ACTION PLAN

Common Name: Short-tailed Albatross

Scientific Name: ***Phoebastria albatrus***

Lead Region: 7

Lead Field Office: Anchorage Fish and Wildlife Field Office

Species Information:

Status: Endangered

Recovery Priority Number or Listing Priority Number: RPN = 8

Recovery Plan or Candidate Assessment Form: Short-tailed Albatross Recovery Plan, Sept. 17, 2008

Most Recent 5-year Review: Initiated May 20, 2009 (74 FR 23739)

Other: Final rule to list (65 FR 147:46643-46654 [July 31, 2000])

Threats: Reduced productivity due to volcanic activity, typhoons, flash floods, high winds, and severe erosion on main breeding colony where 85% of population breeds; political instability at, and lack of access to, 2nd-largest colony where about 15% of population breeds; contaminants, especially oil contamination at sea and plastic ingestion; bycatch in commercial fisheries; predation by avian predators; competitive exclusion and harassment of chicks on breeding colonies by black-footed albatross; and invasive species such as domestic cats, rats, and plants that may degrade the quality of nesting habitat.

Target: Species status improved. The population of this species continues to grow at between 5 and 8% per year. However, after 5 years of optimal population growth, the short-tailed albatross will still not be numerous enough to meet any reclassification goals as set forth in the Short-tailed Albatross Recovery Plan.

Measure: Continued overall population growth greater than 5% per year, and at least one pair of breeding birds present on Mukojima Island, a non-volcanic island to which short-tailed albatross chicks were translocated and hand-reared to fledging beginning in 2008. Because the species has been increasing at near its maximum biological potential for the past decade, an increase in productivity rate is not likely. We continue to reduce the magnitude of threats such as bycatch in commercial fisheries by working directly with domestic and foreign fishing fleets, and by translocating chicks away from the hazardous breeding colony on the volcano at Torishima Island. However, elimination of threats posed by commercial fishing and edaphic factors at the Torishima colony are unlikely to occur in a 5-year span of time. Recovery Criteria will not be met in 5 years, but population models developed for this species predict that recovery may be achieved as early as 2033.

Actions: For a comprehensive list of recovery actions for this species, refer to the Short-tailed Albatross Recovery Plan at

http://alaska.fws.gov/fisheries/endangered/pdf/stal_recovery_plan.pdf. Chick translocation from Torishima Island to Mukojima Island, Japan, is the highest priority recovery action. This is being conducted to establish a new colony at a safe site away from volcanic activity and the severe conditions that occur on the steep, eroding slope of the species main colony on Torishima Island (addresses listing factor A and E in an effort to reduce the threats imposed by volcanism and severe weather events).

Attraction of adults to safe colony locations through the use of decoys and playback of recorded colony calls is another high priority recovery task. This is intended to achieve the same goal as the chick translocation effort, but through different, and less expensive, means (addresses listing factor A and E in an effort to reduce the threats imposed by volcanism and severe weather events). Early indications hint at success, with 50 pairs laying eggs at a location on Torishima Island not subject to many of the threats experienced by the main colony site.

Currently, about 85% of the global population breeds on a steep and eroding fluvial outwash plain comprised of loose volcanic ash on Torishima Island. Japanese conservationists and resource managers from Toho University and the Yamashina Institute of Ornithology continue to take efforts to stabilize this slope and prevent erosion through terracing, transplanting of native grasses, and strategic placement of gabions.

We continue to encourage adoption of bird-safe fishing practices in all relevant fisheries to reduce seabird bycatch to the maximum extent practicable. Our efforts are focused on domestic fisheries, but are also targeting some foreign commercial fisheries, such as the Russian groundfish longline fishery (this suite of tasks addresses listing factors B and D in an effort to reduce mortality of short-tailed albatross on commercial fishing gear). In association with reducing bird bycatch, it is vital that we know the seasonal habitats/distribution of this species. To that end, we have undertaken extensive satellite tagging of different demographic groups over the past decade (over 50 birds have been satellite tagged, including non-breeders, post-breeders, breeders, and fledglings on Torishima, and birds of all ages captured at sea in Alaska).

Identify responsible parties for the actions: The Service collaborates with the Government of Japan (ministry of the Environment), the Yamashina Institute and the Institute for Boninology in the translocation of albatross chicks.

We collaborate with Oregon State University, the University of Massachusetts, and the Yamashina Institute in conducting satellite telemetry work on this species. We also collaborate with the U.S. Geological Survey in maintaining an albatross opportunistic sightings database for purposes of mapping distribution based on "free" information from ships at sea.

We have good working partnerships with NOAA Fisheries, the University of Washington Sea Grant Program, World Wildlife Fund, Alaska Marine Advisory Program, North Pacific Fishery Management Council, Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission, and especially the various associations within the Alaska commercial fishing community. These partnerships are dedicated to reducing seabird bycatch to the lowest possible levels within Alaska and Russian commercial longline fisheries.

Estimated costs of the actions: Estimated costs of translocation are $400,000 per year for 3 more years (it is a 5 year effort, but we completed one year of translocation in 2008 and have funding

on hand for one additional year of translocation in 2010 with some additional funding available to use in 2011).

Satellite telemetry costs have been higher over the past 10 years than they will be over the coming 5 years, as we have completed most of the necessary work for this task. The largest remaining telemetry task is to monitor the post fledging success and dispersal of translocated vs. wild-reared chicks. Cost for this effort is estimated to be $125,000 in 2010. At this time, it is uncertain if telemetry of chicks will be conducted past 2010.

Reducing seabird bycatch is rather an open-ended task, monetarily speaking. In the past 10 years, the Service has invested roughly $2 million in this effort, funding research and distributing seabird avoidance gear to fishermen in the U.S. and abroad. The University of Washington Sea Grant Program has also invested heavily in this effort, with support from the Service and NOAA Fisheries. Future funding needs depend upon how much we choose to invest in helping foreign nations and west coast domestic fisheries reduce their seabird bycatch. We could easily and effectively spend $250,000 per year for the next 5 years in this effort, mostly in working with Japan and Russia to address bycatch issues within their territorial waters.

Role of other agencies: NOAA Fisheries is an essential partner in the reduction of seabird bycatch. They have the lead on developing and enforcing seabird bycatch regulations and in monitoring seabird bycatch rates. The U.S. State Department will play a vital role if we begin to more fully engage foreign governments in seabird bycatch reduction efforts abroad. There has been no documented bycatch of this species in any State-run commercial fisheries. Therefore, the role of the State of Alaska in recovering this species would be limited only by their willingness to join the many entities that are participating in recovery efforts on the species breeding grounds in Japan.

Role of other ESA programs: Ecological Services will continue to be responsible for issuing section 10 recovery permits and conducting section 7 consultations on the effects of commercial fisheries on short-tailed albatross. We will continue to coordinate recovery actions and conduct recovery planning, including seeking outside funding sources, drafting and modifying cooperative research and grant agreements, liaising with foreign governments, serving as a representative on the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, and participating in field research as needed. There is no foreseeable need for HCPs or Safe Harbor agreements for this pelagic maritime species as nearshore fisheries are not likely to have an adverse effect.

Role of other FWS programs: Migratory Birds and State Programs represents the U.S. in bilateral and trilateral Migratory Bird Treaty Act meetings with Japan and Russia. We have coordinated with them and accompanied them in the past several years to these treaty meetings and will continue to draw upon their expertise in the future when it comes to MBTA treaty negotiations.

Additional funding analysis: At this time, we do not have funds to carry out our number one high priority recovery task past 2010; short-tailed albatross chick translocation. We are committed to carrying this effort out for five years, and as of July, 2009, we have completed two translocations totaling 25 translocated and fledged chicks. We still require funding for at least two additional years of translocation (at $400,000 per year). We anticipate some level of funding from the government of Japan and perhaps from some private funding sources such as

the Packard Foundation and commercial corporations in Japan. But these funding sources are not assured, and may not even be likely.

Additional funding for translocation, and associated satellite telemetry monitoring for the 2010 translocation, necessitates that we secure $125K in 2010, $400K in 2011, and $400K in 2012. At that time, our translocation goal will have been largely achieved, assuming high fledging rates of subsequent translocation efforts, and a total of 100 chicks fledged by the end of the 5-year effort. At the conclusion of the five year translocation effort, we will hopefully have established the core of a new short-tailed albatross breeding colony on a safe and formerly occupied island where there is room for tremendous population growth.

The recovery plan requires the establishment of an additional colony on a non-volcanic island prior to delisting or reclassifying to threatened status. Therefore, completing this highest priority recovery task is essential to the recovery of this species. In the course of translocation of chicks, the Yamashina Institute will also be able to maintain, at very low cost, the decoys and sound system used to attract breeding adults to this same colony location. Note that in the absence of successfully establishing this colony, we cannot achieve recovery or reclassification to threatened, but in establishing this colony, we can achieve full recovery as soon as the year 2033. The presence of a third colony prior to consideration of recovery and delisting was a conscious and deliberate consensus decision on the part of the Short-tailed Albatross Recovery Team.

Additional funding of seabird bycatch reduction is a lower priority than is the funding for establishing additional breeding colonies. Population growth continues to be robust in the face of whatever levels of bycatch may be occurring overseas. However, additional funding for bycatch reduction would allow us to conduct additional outreach with Russian longline fishermen and to distribute streamer lines to vessels longlining in Russia's Exclusive Economic Zone. It is less certain what we could accomplish with Japanese fisheries in the way of seabird bycatch reduction. The magnitude of seabird bycatch in Japanese fisheries remains unknown to us. Reducing bycatch in Russia and Japan would serve to further increase the rate of recovery for this species.

Additional bycatch reduction funding expenditures within the U.S. would be largely limited to the provision of additional streamer lines to domestic fishermen and to expenses associated with international coordination to reduce bycatch overseas.

Approved: _____

Regional Director, Alaska Region
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Date: 11/23/05